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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003771

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SUBJECT: LY ELECTION OVERVIEW: THE POLLSTERS WEIGH IN

REF: TAIPEI 03340

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: Taiwan's top polling centers are predicting a close election race between the Pan-Green and Pan-Blue camps for control of the Legislative Yuan (LY), with neither side currently expected to gain a majority. While pollsters agree that a majority for either side is unlikely, their estimates span a wide spectrum. The polling estimates range from a three seat margin of victory for the Pan-Green over the Pan-Blue, with the Pan-Green four seats shy of a controlling majority, to a two seat victory for the Pan-Blue. The pollsters consulted by AIT cautioned that, although they employ rigorous polling methodologies, their polls cannot fully capture Taiwan's complex political landscape. End Summary.

Taiwan's Top Polling Centers: The Estimates

2. (C) The directors of some of Taiwan's top polling centers say their polling data point to a close LY race with only a slim margin of victory for either the Pan-Green or Pan-Blue camp. Almost all media and party surveys predict that neither side appears likely to gain a majority. In the 2001 legislative election the Pan-Blue camp, made up of the Kuomintang (KMT), the People First Party (PFP), and the New Party (NP), gained a majority with 115 out of 225 LY seats, compared to 101 seats for the Pan-Green alliance, composed of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU). Of those 225 seats, 168 are elected from local election districts, 8 from aborigine districts, 8 from overseas Chinese constituencies, and 41 are at-large candidates (Reftel).

3. (C) DPP Survey Center Director Pan Yi-shuan told AIT that internal party polls showed the Pan-Green leading the Pan-Blue 109 to 106 seats -- an eight seat gain for the Pan-Green and a nine seat reduction for the Pan-Blue. Pan said the largest gains in the Pan-Green camp would come from the DPP, whose overall seats she projected would rise to 94 from the 87. She said the TSU is expected to make marginal gains, increasing its seats from 13 to 15. On the Pan-Blue side, Pan predicted the KMT would consolidate its position and pick up seats at the expense of the PFP. Pan warned, however, that the DPP needs to be concerned that overly optimistic predictions that the Pan-Green will gain a majority could weaken Pan-Green-leaning voter turnout and spur apathetic Blues to flock to the polls to defend their endangered legislators.

4. (C) Era Survey Research Center Director Tai Li-an estimates a more modest Pan-Green showing based on his polls, projecting a four seat gain to 105 seats versus a twelve seat loss to 103 for the Pan-Blue. Tai believes the remaining 17 seats will go to independents, many of whom lean Pan-Blue but could, he said, easily be swayed by selective government largesse to support Pan-Green initiatives. According to Tai, his polls show that the weakness within the Pan-Blue camp is coming from PFP candidates, especially those in the southern and central districts of the island. Tai remarked that PFP candidates are being dragged down by the declining reputation of their Chairman James Song and the "ethnic-Mainlander" brand of their party in heavy ethnic Taiwanese areas.

5. (C) TVBS Polling Center Director Wang Yeh-ting is the only one to say the Pan-Blue are in the lead (Note: TVBS consistently showed the Pan-Blue ahead by large margins during the presidential campaign, with its March 20 exit poll projecting a 6 percentage point win by the Lien-Soong ticket). According to Wang, the Pan-Blue will win 105 seats versus 103 for the Pan-Green. Like Pan and Tai, Wang says his data show the DPP will make the biggest gains and take 91 seats while the TSU will gain only 12--far below the 20-plus seats the TSU claims they hope to gain. Wang also says the distribution of seats within the Pan-Blue alliance will shift heavily in favor of the KMT, which will take 71 seats, to the detriment of the PFP, which is projected to get 33 seats--a loss of 13 seats from its 2001 showing. Wang's estimates, like Tai's, project 17 seats for independents with members of the Non-Party Solidarity Union (NSU) picking up 10 seats. Wang said six of the of the remaining seven independents lean Pan-Blue, which could help the Pan-Blue retain control over

the LY.

How They Do It: A Look at Polling Methods

16. (C) All three polling center directors described their polling operations, which are generally similar in size and methods. Each of the three centers employ 50 part-time callers and poll randomly selected households during the evenings between Monday and Friday. Their polling samples are average 1,000 people -- the three directors agreed that samples of 400 to 800 people, used by most other polling centers on Taiwan, are too small and create large sampling errors. The centers began LY district-by-district polls in early October and completed their first roundabout of the island in mid November. Pan said the DPP's efforts will continue, focusing on the more hotly contested districts. TVBS's Wang said his center will re-poll contested areas, focusing on places such as Taipei city and county and Kaohsiung city that have candidates with "star power." The three centers' polls have relatively high response rates, close to 80 percent for the DPP's Survey Center and around 70 percent for ERA and TVBS. Pan and Wang attributed the high numbers to the use of "warm-up" questions and "bi-lingual" callers who can conduct their interviews in Mandarin Chinese and Fujianese (minnanhua) or Hakka dialects, depending on the respondent's language preference.

17. (C) The three centers, however, have taken different approaches to compiling their district polls into an overall estimate of the LY outcome, which perhaps accounts for a large measure of their variation. Pan said the DPP Survey Center took its polling numbers as a basis, but also factored in the results of projected "vote distribution" (peipiao) into its calculations. Wang and Tai said their estimates are more conservative, tallying up polling numbers without heavily factoring vote distribution, which all parties are likely to attempt. Wang admitted that TVBS had yet to conduct polls in Penghu, Hualien, Taitung, Kinmen, and Matsu and was basing its projections in those areas, as well as for the aborigine and overseas Chinese constituencies, on "past experience."

What They Can't Do: The Limits of Polling

18. (C) The polling directors acknowledged that the LY election outcome -- even more so than the 2004 presidential contest -- is difficult to predict because of political factors and local variables that their polls cannot fully capture. Tai said that voter turnout and vote distribution, in particular, are likely to play a determining role. Attempts by both camps in the final week of the election to distribute votes from strong to weak candidates also add to the unpredictability of the race. The distribution of votes is determined by last-minute maneuvering and party calculations that are difficult to gauge in advance through public opinion surveys, said Tai. The 20 to 30 percent non-response rate of those polled further compromises the accuracy of election projections.

19. (C) Pan and Wang warned that some polling conducted on Taiwan is plagued by other "soft" factors. In particular, Pan said that local politicians may manipulate polls, even commission their own data, for various propaganda purposes, such as showing they are a viable contender in their district. Smaller polling centers and companies are known to skew their sampling to deliver results desirable to their paymaster, according to Wang. Emile Sheng, an academic polling expert who has consulted with both TVBS and ERA, told AIT that he was recently threatened with a lawsuit by PFP incumbent Pang Chien-kuo. Sheng said that Pang has alleged that Sheng has intentionally skewed polls to show Pang out of contention for re-election. Sheng noted, however, that all media polls put Pang in exactly the same position (number 14 in the competition for a ten-seat district) in the hotly contested Taipei City South district.

110. (C) Wang further pointed out that his center's polls, like all household-based polling on Taiwan, are more likely to miss young, unmarried professionals, who rely exclusively on cellphones. Wang said that, on the opposite side of the spectrum, some polling companies rely heavily on cellphone interviews, which skews samples against people over 60 years of age who, in the south, tend to be strong DPP supporters. Another group that tends to shy away from participating in polls, especially those perceived as "pro-Blue," are Pan-Green loyalists. Many observers attributed the inaccuracy of TVBS presidential campaign polling, especially their March 20 exit poll, to this factor.

Comment: A Clouded Crystal Ball

111. (C) AIT's discussion with these polling directors suggests that Taiwan polls are at best imperfect soothsayers

of the LY election outcome. Election projections, nevertheless, appear consistent in pointing to a consolidation and expansion of the two major parties, the DPP and the KMT, that will come largely at the expense of their partners, the TSU and the PFP respectively. The expectations of an overall weaker Pan-Blue position track with what AIT is seeing in various districts around the island and point to a new post-election landscape for Taiwan. While the exact numbers may be impossible to predict, it appears increasingly likely that the Pan-Blue will lose it's LY majority and present the Pan-Green, if it makes significant gains, with an opening to woo independents and form a working majority.

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